# The discourse of the city

Kathleen Flanagan

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## 1. Introduction

Have we always lived in cities? Even if we have, they have not been the experience of the majority, and nor are they now. The proportion of the world's population living in urban areas may surpass that living in rural areas, but 'urban area' should not be conflated with 'city'. Moreover, the processes by which people who are 'rural' become 'urban', while normalised as inevitable and uniform, are in practice contingent and situated, and always have been, and the places in which they take place are plural, diverse and distinctive. The title of this collection is 'Towards a philosophy of the city', but perhaps because cities and the ideas associated with them are so multitudinous and contested, identifying a single philosophy that we might work towards is profoundly difficult, even if we could agree on a definition, experience or interpretation of 'the city', which we probably can't.

In response to this difficulty, I have chosen to examine just one aspect of 'the city', the city as a consequence of consumer capitalism, and to do so using a form of discourse analysis. Discourse, rather than, say, political economy or critical urbanism, might be an unusual way to approach this form of 'the city', but the value of a discourse approach is that it exposes not just complexity, but the systems of regulation and ordering of knowledge that, in the usual course of events, prevent us from easily seeing that complexity in the first place. My approach is derived from the work of the French theorist Michel Foucault, particularly his book *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (2002 [1972]). Most notably, within this approach 'discourse' is not another word for 'text', verbal or written. Rather, discourses, says Foucault (2002 [1972]: 45-47, 54-61, 63), should be treated as 'practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak'. Such objects emerge from particular 'surfaces', are 'delimited, designated, named and established', and categorised and classified according to 'grids of specification'. Their emergence makes available positions, functions or statuses that can be occupied by discursive subjects. Brought together in regularised, specific relation to each other, they enable the existence of 'a set of rules for arranging statements in series, an obligatory schemata of dependence, of order, and of successions, in which the recurrent elements that may have value as concepts [are] distributed'. Compliance with these rules determines the truth or falsity of statements made with respect to them. Put simply: discourses form systems by which we order and make sense of the raw material of the world; discourses make available to us ways of thinking, being and acting in relation to these systems of order; discourse forms the conditions by which knowledge emerges as legitimate, credible and authoritative.

What all this means with respect to cities is spelled out below. My aim is to describe the city as a discursive object and the subjectivities that are available in relation to it, and then, from this, the knowledge that is thereby enabled, the ways it is operationalised into practice, and finally, and importantly, the discursive silences, the things that are not said or sayable about the city. Since a discursive object is 'what [a discourse] is talking about' (Foucault 2002 [1972]: 46), in talking about the city as an object, I am also speaking about the discourse of which it is an object, and this brings me to consumer capitalism. This is a notion that all by itself could occupy several books—but instead, I adopt the approach of Ritzer and Jurgenson (2010: 15), who suggest that '[w]hether it is called consumer society, consumer culture, or even consumer capitalism is less significant than the fact that all of these ideas draw our attention to the increasing importance of consumption'. In most societies of the global North, 'norms, values and meanings' have been reorganised around consumption, and increasingly exclusively so. Yet, Ritzer and Jurgenson (2010) go on to argue, separating 'consumption' from its corollary, 'production', is problematic: they develop an argument for the importance of what they refer to as 'prosumption' (production and consumption), especially as it operates in digital space.

The particulars of their argument are less relevant here as I am not exclusively focussed on the digital city. But their point—that practices of consumption and production are interdependent, even co-constituted—is important. Discursively, consumption and production remain separate—'prosumption' is an arcane academic contention rather than 'truth'—if related concepts. But more than this, within the discourse of the city I am describing, they are required to be separate, for reasons that will become evident below. The discourse of the modern city, the global city, the city brand, the consumer city, contains within it distinct discursive silences, and at a very crude level, production is one of these—the other is the silence of those discursively aligned with neither production nor consumption. It is through consideration of these silences that I seek to demonstrate some of the contradictions that underpin the edifice of 'the city' and to draw attention to the potential for other ways of seeing and doing urban life.

## 2. Describing the city

As a discursive object, 'the city' contains particular elements and associations—the city is, in the words of the children's song, 'hustle and bustle / Living in the city is fun / Cars and buses rushing by, / buildings twenty storeys high / Living in the city is fun' (Donlan n.d.). Cities are 'magnificent and exciting places' (Franklin 2010: 10), more than the sum of their parts: 'the beginning of what is distinctively modern in our civilization is best signalized [*sic*] by the growth of great cities ... gigantic aggregations around which cluster lesser centres and from which radiate the ideas and practices that we call civilization' (Wirth 1938: 1-2).

The magnificence of cities derives in part from the labour with which they have been produced. A city is 'built'—it is purposefully and artificially created and recreated over time,

the tangible product of human ingenuity, of strength and effort and energy exerted, of matter extracted and processed, manipulated and re-ordered. Cities are frequently characterised using biological language: as 'organisms' or 'ecosystems', implying the integrated operation of multiple, interdependent components organised into scalable networks directed at sustaining life (Bettencourt et al. 2007: 7302). This metabolism is not purely biological: '[t]he urban world is a cyborg world, part natural part social, part technical part cultural' (Swyngedouw 2006: 118). A city's infrastructure regulates, directs and contains the movements of its contents, be they people, cars, things or information, human or non-human. Commuters, encased in their cars, are channelled into road networks, over which their movements are centrally controlled by the strategic use of traffic lights and speed limit signs, or collected into train stations from which they are disgorged at timed, regular intervals; random and unpredictable elements like pets or children are contained in designated spaces marked out for 'play'; information flows through sealed conduits below ground or through wires suspended on poles (see Filion & Keil 2017; O'Neill 2017). And increasingly, these complex configurations of the built and material are replicated in the digital domain as such 'hard' means of regulation become digitised and thereby both absent (unseeable, untouchable) and omnipresent (as mobile phone networks and Wi-Fi) (Steele, Hussey & Dovers 2017).

The complexity of cities means they are crowded with people, yet these crowds provoke not intimacy and involvement but anonymity (Simmel 1903). Such anonymity confers a sort of privacy, in that one's presence in the city can pass unremarked and one's activities, through the sheer duplication of them by multiple, proximate others, can become invisible. However, despite this, living in a city remains an inherently public experience. Cities of course contain private and semi-private spaces. People live in homes and work in offices and institutions, and they frequent parks, gyms, cafes and shops, spaces to which entry is, if not entirely privatised, certainly contingent on behaving in certain legitimate ways and having certain legitimate purposes. However, in a city, life is inherently experienced and more importantly expressed as a public activity. Increasingly, it is also an activity involving, even mandating, consumption, a consumption that extends beyond the familiar idea of the accumulation of 'stuff' to encompass the consumption of experiences. City dwellers do not just drink coffee—they drink particular types of coffee in particular ways in particular locations (Laurier, Whyte & Buckner 2001), and their choices say something not just about who they are, but also about the nature of the urban place within which those choices are made.

In the city, urban space is aestheticised in very specific, if varied, ways. This aesthetic can be the globalised, homogenous adherence to a certain set of trends—what the journalist Kyle Chayka (2016) calls 'AirSpace'—or the designated 'beauty' of noted landmarks such as churches, architecture or 'heritage,' or the more colourful manifestation of diversity and proximity to the local, the authentic and the 'cultural'. Whatever the palette, however, within the discursive practice of cities the aesthetic is commoditised and directed at a particular purpose. In city discourse, a city is a 'destination', somewhere to go, an aggregation of smaller destinations, of stadiums, concert halls, convention centres,

museums, places to eat and drink and be seen, and multiple other 'attractions' which can be visited by the one who does the going. This sense of destination is captured in older ideas about seeking one's fortune amid the bright lights, opportunities and temptations of the city (Arden 1954), but it also has the more pointed connotation of a destination for particular things, primarily investment capital and tourists, and these situate the city according to the logic of competition and contestation. Each city is pitted against others fighting for the same attention and patronage and each city must therefore depict itself as the best and only possible destination for those things.

Global capitalism replicates itself through flagships, franchises and a proliferation of mobile yet carefully-regulated brands (Klein 2001). In many cases, the consistency of the product regardless of the location is part of the brand's identity (the Big Mac, the IKEA bookshelf, the décor at Starbucks). But for competing cities, ubiquitous, homogenised aesthetics and experiences, while natural consequences of consumer capitalism allied to technological integration (see Chayka 2016), are problematic. To be a 'destination', a city must be inherently and indisputably unique—otherwise, why go *there*? The imperative to offer something different anchors the universal city to the specific and particular 'local' of its own geographical place. Thus the global city promotes itself as the entry point to local food and wine, culture, distinctive architecture, natural features, festivals and sporting events, things that cannot be replicated elsewhere. Such locality also manifests in claims to indispensability—the best, the only place to be for those wishing to undertake particular types of activities, such as financial trading, for example. This is a harder argument to make, because many such activities take place within a place-less electronic realm and are therefore not spatially fixed. So the attraction instead becomes the presence of like-minded others, and the agglomeration of interactions, innovations and talents that will result (e.g. Glaeser 2011).

The global cities of the world, even and especially the alpha ++ ones (Taylor et al. 2009), contain plenty of discount stores, factory outlets and franchisees, but it is not these more democratised and accessible brands that are most salient in the image projected outwards from London or New York. The imperatives of consumer capitalism also drive cities to embrace other qualities that play out in local spaces, qualities encapsulated by words like 'premium' or 'elite'. Pedestrian urban streetscapes are overwritten by outlets for high-end fashion, expensive restaurants, 'gourmet' grocers and other markers of gentrification which cater for the needs and demands of an increasingly wealthy minority of the population—the physical materialisation of what Koh, Wissink and Forrest (2016: 30-33) have termed 'super-rich spatiality'. The spaces produced and practices enabled within them are exclusionary and unobtainable for the majority, but they function to push out the limits of individual aspiration (Hamilton & Denniss 2005; Kapferer & Bastien 2009). Ideas of 'the good life' are collapsed together with access to money, and through it, to consumer goods, comfort and leisure (Verdouw 2016).

The language of 'alpha' cities derives from research that has categorised world cities according to their size and influence. Those who have driven this research acknowledge that

from such classifications, it is 'almost natural' to proceed to theories of competition and hierarchy, but they nonetheless reject these in favour of a cooperative, 'interlocking network' theory of city relationships which can be measured by examining the economic geography of transnational service firms (Taylor et al. 2009). In this network model, the classifications describe the level of relational integration between cities rather than implying some form of status. Of course, what is 'almost natural' is usually normative; it is not easy to displace ideas of inter-city competition or the practices that feed them. However, the basis of this 'interlocking network' theory does point though another characteristic of city discourse. This is the paradox that while cities are territorially situated (part of a nation state), some are simultaneously trans-territorial, nodes in a globalised economy in which advances in information and communication technology, mainstream access to travel and the commodification of leisure (Koh, Wissink & Forrest 2016) have made nationality and national allegiance less important.

That the trans-territorial city is a space free from national parochialism and chauvinism becomes highly problematic as soon as the discussion turns to specific places and times (e.g. Malpas 2009). But the notion persists because of another set of ideas in which cities are inextricably associated with trade, and therefore with exchange, innovation and social progression. Such ideas are more compatible with—and therefore more 'true' according to—the discursive formation that produces 'the city' as a consumer object and a tradeable commodity. Trade, normatively declares the chief executive of the Business Council of Australia, leads to societies 'constantly learning and borrowing from other cultures, stimulating new advances in the sciences, philosophy, language and religion', while economic failure, due to lack of trade, produces 'failed states, and… conflict, with ordinary people suffering the most' (Westacott 2017). The convergence of financial exchange, innovation and progress in the discursive site of the city makes the city intrinsically directional and future-oriented. Cities progress, and progress is good; 'the country' is static, where nothing happens.

This series of ideas is activated in a series of practices that enable city identities to be leveraged into investment, wealth creation and status by organising the components of the city according to certain 'grids of specification'. These include the 'organised networks of elements' (Foucault 2002 [1972]: 47) that constitute technology, marketing and metrics. For example, as people upload their holiday snaps of city life to Facebook, Instagram and Tumblr, they are taking the individual elements of the city object and ordering them according to a particular mode of expressing experience—the curation of social media imagery is itself part of the performance and embodiment of the practice of being in the twenty-first century city (as well as being a form of 'prosumption' [Ritzer & Jurgenson 2010]). Advertising, marketing and brand management techniques function similarly as a discursive surface upon which 'the city' can be arranged and specified, outwardly directed for the purposes of attracting tourism and inwardly, as part of the self-imaging, marketing and stakeholder management undertaken by city-level governments in order to present a city to itself. Both sets of practices curate reality, selecting, ordering and customising the city for the consumption of a given public.

The most easily identified 'grids of specification', however, are the proliferating methods for ranking and comparing cities, such as the *Economist*'s Liveability Index, under which Melbourne has been ranked the 'world's most liveable city' for seven consecutive years (*Economist* 2017). There are others, of varying profiles and credibility—the 'world's most elegant city' (Paris), awarded by the 'Berlin-based online fashion merchandise store' Zalando (Trimble 2017); the 'world's most visited city' (Bangkok), identified by the Mastercard-sponsored Global Destinations Cities Index (Talty 2017); the 'world's least stressful city' (Stuttgart), awarded, following analysis of multiple 'sets of data', by the 'laundry services start-up' Zipjet (*The Local* 2017); and the 'world's most powerful city' (New York), determined by the Global City Economic Power Index of the Martin Prosperity Institute headed by 'creative city' guru Richard Florida (Florida 2012). The latter is itself a compilation of other indices—the Brookings' Institution's Global Metro Monitor Map, the Global Financial Centres Index of Z/Yen (a 'think tank and consultancy'); the *Economist*'s Global City Competitiveness Index ('which includes 32 indicators of economic strength, physical capital, financial maturity, institutional character, human capital, global appeal, social and cultural character and environment and natural hazards'), the Global Cities Index produced by AT Kearney, a consulting firm, and the United Nations' City Prosperity Index which is formulated through consideration of 'five dimensions: productivity, infrastructure, quality of life, equity and social inclusion and environmental sustainability' (Florida 2015). Through layers of self-evidently 'objective' criteria, these metrics systematically define and interpret the city's 'success', while simultaneously producing versions of the city that can be reproduced in global sales pitches.

## 3. Subjects of the city

Melbourne uses the 'most liveable' moniker in both internal and external place-marketing; the Victorian Government statement greeting Melbourne's most recent elevation to 'most liveable' status pointed to Melbourne's 'buzz', its attractiveness to 'the world's best' and the way it features '[t]he biggest exhibitions, the best events, world-renowned restaurants' (Andrews 2017). The Government portal providing information for business, investors and skilled migrants uses the 'prestigious' ranking as evidence of 'Melbourne and Victoria's desirability as a migration destination for Significant Investors and other business and skilled migrants' (Live In Melbourne 2017). Invest Victoria (2018) contextualises the *Economist*'s ranking with information about where Victoria sits in relation to, among others, its popularity among expats (the Expat Insider 2014 Survey) and the Times Higher Education World University Rankings. But a different view was put by the head of the Victorian Council of Social Service, Emma King, who told journalists that the title of 'most liveable' '[glossed] over the realities of life in Melbourne for many people': 'Did The Economist survey anybody who's living under a bridge or skipping meals to pay their power bill?' (in Chalkley-Rhoden 2017).

Yet while the heads of welfare agencies may be called upon, in the name of 'balance', to provide counter-commentary in media coverage of the Global Liveability Index, their discursive authority and legitimacy is limited. That is, the subject-positions from which it is possible to subvert the successful, competitive, desirable city are subject-positions from which it is not possible to speak discursive 'truth'. That capacity is instead made available to other subjects. Political leaders, especially local representatives, can speak as promoters and defenders of their city—thus Melbourne's Lord Mayor speaks with discursive authority when he states that the 'most liveable' designation 'is an amazing feat' and 'an important selling point for Melbourne internationally: for businesses to invest or move here, for the best and brightest people to make Melbourne their home and for tourists to visit us' (in Chalkley-Rhoden 2017). Business 'leaders', entrepreneurs and investors, whose presence is used by indexes of achievement as a measure of a city's success, can speak, and have their speaking recognised as valid beyond their own self-interest. Thus property developers calling for changes to metropolitan policy and planning will be discursively situated as speaking for the city rather than for their own opportunity and profit (Jacobs & Flanagan 2018; c.f. Clark & Moonen 2018; Bleby 2018; Condon 2018). Outside 'experts' are given status and authority precisely because they are externally situated. Their objective mastery of data and metrics, of indices and rankings, is not contaminated by the local and parochial. Their statements convey a 'widely accepted' 'accolade' while those of insiders and residents are the speech of 'naysayers and whingers' (Chalkley-Rhoden 2017).

Similarly, the unpalatable truths or unanticipated endorsements from other types of 'expert' are received as correct, credible and indisputable (e.g. as in Pryor 2018; Raabus 2010). Such 'expertise' may be deliberately introduced in order to generate connections and relationships between the city and its aspirations—the urban planning consultant or place management expert who will devise a new vision for a better (more walkable, more liveable, more vibrant, more cultural) mode of urban living (e.g. Raabus 2010). Though usually correlated with externality, such as through international university affiliations, this form of the 'expert' can include and overlap with the externally-validated but internally-situated entrepreneurial subject. The subjective functions taken up by (and assigned to) David Walsh, the owner of Hobart's Museum of Old and New Art, are a case in point (see for example Rentschler, Lehman & Fillis 2018).

The positions of 'expert', 'decision-maker' or 'investor' in relation to the discursive object of the city are relatively well-defined. But alongside these more established ways of relating to 'the city' there is a less formalised, less institutionalised category of speaking subject, one that has been established, promulgated and legitimised by the emergence of new ways in which to speak. Social media and the associated proliferation of 'likes', on-line reviews and user-generated content have enabled new forms of statement that were unimagined at the time Foucault developed his ideas on discourse. The subject that speaks through the Instagram dashboard, the Twitter hashtag and the Facebook page is one which I will somewhat clumsily label as 'authentic experiencer of the city'. It too is an expert subjectivity, but it is expertise derived not from external institutional authority or

professional status, but from directly obtained experiences of occupying, embodying and performing city life.

Such democratisation of the role of speaking subject is problematic in a discursive context, because discourse has power precisely because it is rare and scarce. The exclusivity of discourse is preserved by certain procedures that control and regulate access to it, enclosing and confining knowledge and its uses to particular statuses, functions and positions (Foucault 1981 [1970]). It is one of these procedures that is called into play within the discourse of the city to manage the new, unruly proliferation of speaking subjects. Foucault (1981 [1970]: 61-64) labelled it by reference to 'large social cleavages in what might be called the social appropriation of discourse'. He pointed out that although we supposedly have the 'right' to access any discourse via education, in reality, the distribution of education is 'marked out by social distance, oppositions and struggles. Any system of education is a political way of maintaining or modifying the appropriation of discourses, along with the knowledge and powers which they carry'. Use of Instagram or Facebook to post news and images about one's experiences of visiting or living in the city does not require entry to and negotiation of a system of education, but there are nonetheless forms of 'social distance, oppositions and struggles' in operation. Social media profiles are highly curated expressions of identity and allegiance but their governing criteria are not necessarily user-defined. There is a small but growing body of research examining the complex dynamics of self-presentation and impression management in digital space (e.g. Hogan 2010; Zhao et al. 2013), including the 'visibility labour' of the Instagram 'influencer' (Abidin 2016), while in the popular media there is considerable scrutiny of the line between the depiction and the 'real' (e.g. Banks 2018; Bowen 2015). Such critique prompts questioning of the 'authenticity' of images which purport to show 'real' life but are in reality carefully refined, filtered and manipulated to show something else. But equally critical are the criteria by which the nature of that 'something else' is determined.

## 4. Knowing the city

Up to this point I have described the objects and subjects of city discourse. But the purpose of discourse analysis is not only to describe what is there, but to identify how the relations that are established amongst subject(s) and object(s) enable certain ways of knowing and give certain things the status of 'truth'. So what is 'knowable' within the discourse of the city? In this section of the chapter, I identify three things about the city that are made knowable by the discursive formation within which it is situated and which are, in the discourse of the city, considered 'true'. Crucially, 'true' in this context does not mean 'right'. What is at stake here is not whether it is objectively correct to say a given thing about the city; rather, the emphasis is on how, within the discourse of the city, certain forms of knowledge are produced and validated, while other kinds are closed off and rendered less inaccessible. This is important because such a state of affairs produces consequences that are distributed amongst people and places in uneven ways.

## Knowledge 1: the city is independent

When the Lord Mayor of Melbourne speaks of Melbourne's liveability, he speaks of Melbourne, not of the state of Victoria or the nation of Australia. It is not Victorians or Australians who 'should be extremely proud of today' but 'Melburnians'. This may be natural—the Mayor is elected by Melburnians to govern the geographical location of Melbourne—but it is also inherently enabled by a discursive formation in which it is the city that is the source of authentic experience—not the nation, not the region, not, in most cases, the suburbs. It is the city within which experiences, events and spectacles are located, it is the city within which a particular lifestyle is available, it is the city to which investment, people and products are to be attracted. As cities aspire to—and attain—the status of being a 'global' or 'world' city, they aspire to exist beyond the national boundaries within which they are located and also to exist in spite of them.

Some writers, such as Catherine Fennell (2015), have linked this to the retreat of the welfare state, arguing that as both the ideal and operation of nationally-funded, universally-provided social security is eroded, the provision of social care is inevitably localised because the consequences—poverty, homelessness, crime—are most observable and felt at the local level. To create an environment within which such care can be extended, cities have to cultivate an identity that is municipal rather than regional or national. Of course, in many countries such a trend, if it exists, co-exists with resurgent nationalist sentiments that explicitly reject claims to global connectivity, cosmopolitanism and diversity for their elitism, ethnic complexity and disconnection from the lives of 'real' people (see Malpas 2009). But this does not destabilise the discourse of the global city, because both city discourse and parochial nationalism affirm compatible identities for the city, albeit it for different reasons—whether the city is dissociated from the nation or transcends the nation, the city is different, separate and distinct.

## Knowledge 2: the outsider is better

The identity of a 'place', especially one with cultural, historical or aesthetic significance, is jointly constituted by the external gaze of the tourist and the place-attachment of the residents (Bernardo, Almeida & Martins 2017). But the discourse of the city does not situate both equally. Instead it privileges the regard of the tourist, the outsider-expert and the metric over the views of residents. In a globalised world, where there is 'tension within local places between searching out ever wider spheres of exchange and movement and simultaneously provoking an inward and deliberate search for authenticity, a conscious effort to evoke a sense of place and cultivate connections' (Williams 2002: 357), the discourse of the city which I am describing here takes sides.

Of course, the claims of locally-situated subjects are not unproblematic—as Williams (2002: 352) notes in the context of the American West, 'who counts as a "local" and … what it means to be a local or an old-timer is problematic and often contested' given the history of itinerancy and mobility, the hierarchies set in place as a result of uneven access to wealth and property, and forced dispossession of the Indigenous people in that and other parts of the world (see also Rogers 2017). But within the discourse of the city that I am describing

here, the subject-position of outsider-expert has greater authority than that of a 'resident' because of the different ways in which each is situated in relation to the object of the 'local'. For the latter, the 'local' is a contaminant—it makes them parochial and self-interested. For the former, 'local' is desirable: a conduit or entry point for outsiders looking to share what is 'local' as if they were locals themselves. This internationalises the local, rather than protecting it, preserving it or keeping it secret. Local is valued only to the extent that it is globally accessible.

In practical terms, this means that local actors who, for example, oppose a new development on the grounds that it will change the existing character of the city will be cast into the subject-position of 'NIMBYs' or similar oppositional space. The 'NIMBY' (not in my backyard) is a caricature that has been extensively problematised (e.g. Wolsink 2006; Freudenburg & Pastor 1992; Wexler 1996), but it remains effective, partly because it is a moral label, applied to those who unreasonably object to socially necessary developments, such as safe storage of nuclear waste (Welsh 1993), affordable housing (Ruming 2014) or services for low income households (Dear 1992; Gleeson & Memon 1994; Takahashi & Dear 1997), including mass transit (Weitz 2008). That is, the motivations of the NIMBY are easily attributed to the NIMBY's selfish and even ignorant regard for their own interests ahead of the collective needs of society (Lidskog & Elander 1992; Lake 1993) and at the expense of vulnerable groups (Gerrar 1994). The locally-situated subject who seeks to resist local development becomes enmeshed in this charge of uncaring selfishness by association.

With regard to the discourse of the city, however, what becomes problematic is that NIMBYs are essentially arguing against change. Such arguments are inimical because the successful city is defined by its commitment to aspiration, progress and innovation; to the extent that they enable these things, tourist infrastructure, residential density and commercial redevelopment, however radically they rewrite the built and natural environments, become social necessities. This does not mean there is no space for resistance within the discourse, but those who wish to resist must appropriate elements of the city discourse to make their case in terms that are considered 'true'. For example, opposition can be successful if framed as a desire to ensure the city remains an attractive destination—that is, by remaining outwardly oriented—but it cannot be discursively legitimate if directed at decreasing the city's attractiveness to outsiders.

### Knowledge 3: the city must compete

Academics may argue that competition is not the only way to read practices which classify and rank cities against each other (Taylor et al. 2009) but such calls carry little weight; competition is positioned as desirable and productive in many fields of human activity, and it is therefore entirely 'natural' in relation to the global city. But discursively, the configuration of object (the city) and subjectivities (the privileged expert, the political advocate, the entrepreneur) direct competitive expression in particular ways. Cities are places of excitement, innovation and activity, and thus cities compete to be exciting, innovative and active places. Cities are place where change is constant, and valorised as a sign of open-mindedness, progress and technical prowess, and thus cities must embrace

change to be successful competitors. Cities are destinations for the 'best' and therefore the experiences, goods and services on offer from competitive cities must be imbued with that quality, either due to rarity and exclusivity (to a place, to a certain kind of access), or value (cultural or economic), and preferably both. Cities are stages for a particular way of occupying urban space and thus successful cities must offer their residents and even more particularly their visitors a lifestyle that is compatible with city norms. Individual cities are the 'world's most' (insert: innovative, liveable, exciting, successful), and thus their activities are disciplined and directed by the configuration of variables in the various indexes, metrics and league tables which measure these qualities. To be such a city is a ubiquitous aspiration, but the point of aspiring to it is to be the only one.

## 5. City practice

Discourse, I argued above, is a set of 'rules' conditioning the production of truth. But truth on its own is not all there is to it. Discourse is articulated, expressed and put into effect through discursive practice, a form of 'thinking and doing' (Florence 1998 [c. 1980]: 463) which lies at the intersection between what is said (and known) and 'what is done' (Foucault 1991 [1980]: 75). Drawing on Foucault, Reckwitz (2002: 250) defined 'practice' as 'a routinized way in which bodies are moved, objects are handled, subjects are treated, things are described and the world is understood… a "type" of behaving and understanding that appears at different locales and at different points of time and is carried out by different body/minds'.

In the discourse of the city, the primary way of thinking and doing, behaving and understanding is the urban 'lifestyle', a set of activities that are articulated and enabled through advertising, urban planning and popular culture, with disciplinary effects on discursive subjects. Lifestyle is performative and thus outwardly oriented, although at the level of the individual, practices may also be internalised and embodied. Importantly, 'lifestyle' is enabled by a certain kind of urban environment and inhibited by others. Lifestyle requires specific types of gathering places—cafes, bars, festivals—and these places are usually predicated on consumption of some kind. Lifestyle requires private space to be configured for public cultural display (the outfitting of rooms in the home for 'entertaining', the always-completed of landscaping rather than the work-in-progress of gardening). Lifestyle requires the provision of other facilities within which associated activities can take place—consumption of goods and services that are symbolically compatible with the city, which offer access to fashion, status and creativity. Thus 'lifestyle' and the discursive object and associated subjectivities of the city are interdependent; the former is the articulation and operationalisation of the latter.

Lifestyle also excludes. The habitus of café culture acts to regulate and homogenise ways of being in public, both indirectly, through implicit social sanctioning of behaviour, dress or mannerisms that do not 'fit', and directly, through the efforts of proprietors to police the streetscape in order to protect their customers from unpleasant or uncomfortable sights

that might detract from the quality of their experience. Thus gatherings of patients waiting for their daily pharmacotherapy treatment outside a local pharmacy become, in the view of traders overseeing pavement tables in the adjacent gentrified café strip, 'gang-like conversions' that are 'threatening' to patrons (see Duncan 2007).

Other, more technical modes of practice arise from the discourse of the city. 'City branding' is an assembly of professional expertise, knowledge production and governance techniques articulated on multiple platforms, including the promotional activities of the 'authentic experiencer', advertising, marketing campaigns, the re-planning and re-writing of physical and cultural landscapes and the ritualised performances of exhibitions and promotional events. The 'fictive spectacle' (Boland 2013) thus crafted speaks to outsiders of a city's authenticity and identity but it simultaneously 'imposes' upon insiders a particular, 'frozen' version of the city that, while offering opportunities through which to display, preserve and express value for local customs, culture and history, may simultaneously iron away fine local distinctions, historical tensions and socio-economic grievance (see also Ooi 2011).

City branding responds to the 'true' fact of competition: cities are 'compelled' to 'establish a competitive, cosmopolitan identity in the contemporary world ... to bring their "information flows" ... in line with an urban population that is multicultural, mobile and frequently transient ... [and] become part of those new linkages that bind them across national borders' (Paganoni 2012: 14). But if cities are competing against other cities, then both their engagement within the competition and their success or failure at it need to be demonstrable in some way. Thus the correlating practice of city branding is the practice of city ranking and indexing. Similarly complex, opaque and multi-platform, it simultaneously legitimises the process of branding and regulates it.

The link that brings the urban lifestyle and the inter-city competition into relation with each other is the practice of urban redevelopment. Spatial planning, argues Boland (2013: 269), has been co-opted as 'a significant accessory to the sophistry of city branding', and in allowing this to happen, spatial planners have become complicit in concealing, even ignoring, 'the acute social and economic malaise that scars large parts of our major cities'. This is a practice by which the built environment is rewritten to facilitate the city 'lifestyle'. Because this lifestyle is a highly urbanised one, because concentration and proximity of a diversity of experiences is central to it, this reconfiguring of the urban landscape involves the proliferation of hotels and apartment complexes, recreational opportunities and forms of retail and commercial space that enable and promote city-compatible forms of consumerism (Boland 2013). But the practice of urban redevelopment is directed at more than summoning outsiders. Branding may be 'principally about sexing up the city in the international beauty contest for investment, tourism, events, shoppers and new residents' (Boland 2013: 269), and it may colonise the planning and development processes to achieve this, but these processes are also internally directed at targeting, classifying and reorganising its own residents.

That is, although in its effects the result of such redevelopment looks very like gentrification, alongside displacement that arises at a distance (because of 'the market' and its 'rising house prices' which 'price out' existing residents and consign them to other, less 'well-located' areas, to recite the usual explanation) come other strategies designed to more directly cleanse the city of that which is incompatible with it. Boland (2013) notes the emphasis on security and the social profiling activities which accompanied the re-generation and re-branding of Liverpool. In the same category are periodic 'crackdowns' on so-called 'rough sleepers' and the relocation of services that might attract unsightly clientele, like needle exchanges, pharmacotherapy services or homeless shelters, to less visible or populous areas. There are modifications to the built environment, such as so-called 'defensive' street furniture (also called 'hostile architecture')—seating purposefully designed to be incompatible with any use other than sitting, thereby preventing people using it to sleep on, or modifications to surfaces, such as edgings or spikes, to prevent people using them for skateboarding or for rest. Such changes represent 'the intentional "designing out" of certain identities, behaviours and categories of people from urban and public spaces' (Petty 2016: 68), and the crafting, instead, of 'an idealised and sanitised version of urban life' in which consumption is unimpeded, the unpredictable and unexpected have been 'disciplined', and architecture and urban design have been used to privatise the public sphere (Sandercock 1997: 30; also Coleman, Tombs & Whyte 2005).

However, the 'constructed aesthetic' (Petty 2016: 75) of the city depends for its legitimacy on more than just the facilitation of gentrification and the removal of rogue elements. Cities are also defined by their openness, their diversity and their cultural colour. These qualities are also appropriated into the practice of city 'planning' and re-articulated into certain genres of discursive knowledge, such as the glossy, high-concept community 'vision' that will convert an ordinary city into something significant (e.g. Gehl Architects 2010). They can also find their expression in a domestic form of city branding practice, through the commodification of cultural experiences—festivals, the use of street-art aesthetics, the 'pop-up'—which function as tangible demonstrations of the promise on offer within the city brand.

## 6. Silence in the city

Finally, in the city, as in many places, there are things that are not said. Such silences point to the possibilities and forms of knowledge that are not available within a given discursive formation, which are rendered as 'not true' by the rules of the discourse and which, if articulated and recognised, would make the formation unstable. There are two silences in the discourse of the city which I want to highlight here.

### Silence 1: exploitation

Contemporary urban life emerged from agrarian and feudal societies via a series of processes, collapsed under the term 'industrialisation', which converted coal, gas and oil into energy and applied it to increasing the speed of communication and the mobility of

people, products and information (Watson 1993: 3-4; Giddens 2009: 217-221). This much, of course, is not silent, although the normative interdependencies this narrative creates and maintains between 'the city', 'the modern' and western history have been problematised, including for the ways in which they silence and limit theories and knowledge of the urban (Robinson 2013; Leontidou 1996) and the sociological (Connell 1997). We generally accept that the global city is only possible because people, things and knowledge can be extracted from different parts of the globe, assembled, disassembled, moved about, and then reassembled at the site of their consumption, albeit in constantly shifting and irrepressibly mobile configurations. We see this as exciting and positive: it is to our benefit that there are now 'global supply chains in which Australian businesses—big and small—can find new customers and source productivity-boosting products from almost anywhere in the world, growing their companies and expanding the tax base that underpins the social safety net' (Westacott 2017).

But the chains of production and manufacture that underpin this mobility, and which produce the technical hardware, freight and migration that renders it all workable, are rooted in the Global South. Coffee, so central to so much city 'lifestyle', has a provenance that is inextricably entangled with the exploitation of and extraction from the Global South that began with colonisation and continues today (Brockway 1983; Connell 2007; Rogers 2017). The link between rich and poor established by the chain of transactions leading from coffee plantations to cafe tables is itself evidence of the sustained and untenable global inequality generated and sustained by consumer capitalism. Further, many of the essential artefacts of modern life are constructed from resources that are limited and extracted in ways that cause unevenly-distributed environmental and social harm (Klein 2001, 2014). The claim is that by bringing such conveniences to ever-widening audiences of consumers, capitalism is driving global improvements in living standards and quality of life and lifting people out of poverty. Yet if these are the ends, then the means are problematic, if for no other reason than universal attainment of the normative 'lifestyle' would bring discourse crashing into the limits of non-discursive reality. (Bluntly put, there is simply not enough of anything—or if there is, the cost of extracting and exploiting it to full capacity would be unacceptably high—for the entire planetary population to live according to the ideal of the modern city). This is the silence: the city, or at least, the city I am describing, is a product of consumer capitalism which rests upon a system of global relations that are exploitative, inequitable and unsustainable.

This is the case even within the city itself. The 'precariat' is a term used to refer to the growing segment of the working population structurally compelled to contingent, insecure and fragmented labour—people without access to the stable, regulated, adequately remunerated and fulfilling work which was the ideal of the social democratic, labour and trade union movements in the post-war period (Standing 2014). The visual image associated with the term is of a tenuous grip at the edge of a great height—of clinging, barely, to life. It is one of marginality and periphery. This visualisation is a persistent one, despite the fact that the urban precariat exists in the very heart, physically, of the city. It is the precariat who clean the high rise offices and drive their occupants to the airport. They are the

childcare workers and disability support workers who tend to the bodies of the most vulnerable. They collect the sanitary bins from the women's toilet, sell petrol and chewing gum, and wipe down the tables in the food court.

These two aspects of inequality intersect within the even greater silence on which contemporary processes of manufacture and production rest: colonialism, which made industrialisation, and then post-industrialisation, possible, but which is rarely acknowledged as a contemporary reality. It both enabled and depended upon the extraction and removal of mineral and agricultural wealth—and the labour with which to work it—from the colonies. The scientific disciplines which shaped modernity, such as cartography, biology, botany and astronomy among others, fed off raw material and data obtained without consent from the South (see Seth 2009; Connell 2007). The economies of colonial powers rested on multiple layers of violence: the violent invasion of occupied lands, slavery, penal transportation (Reynolds 2006; Hochschild 2005; Hughes 1996). All of this is known, and alleged to be in the past, but it isn't—it is unpalatable but accurate to say that the present distribution of wealth and status across the globe rests as much on these mechanisms of dispossession, land-claiming and violence as do injustices of the past (Rogers 2017).

The day-to-day social practices of everyday city life are rendered possible and pleasurable by these mechanisms but simultaneously depend on them remaining invisible. Clearly 'invisible' is not meant literally. We know about these things, but not in ways that would make our current way of life untenable. Our knowledge is instead made bearable because, discursively, it is managed through the deployment of the anonymised subjectivity of a distant, unreachable 'them'. 'They' are victims of exploitative labour practices, poverty and our own complicity in supporting the vast, unsustainable edifice of cheap manufacturing, planned obsolescence, and endless consumption. 'They' are helpless and valorised and cried over. But they are also denied individuality and agency—if they express resistance, it must be within confines and expectations established by 'us', and if they express acquiescence, this is simply an extended performance of their initial victimhood. And although boycotts, Fairtrade campaigns and shareholder activism do try at various levels to draw back the veil of silence covering the global chains of manufacture and production and the injustices that they create and perpetuate, the effect is to further direct the gazes of those of us in the former colonies away from ourselves and therefore away from the injustices created and perpetuated by colonisation. The idea that the lifestyle encapsulated in the act of drinking a sustainably-sourced, fairly-traded latte in an inner-city hipster café in Sydney or Melbourne (or Los Angeles or Miami, or Toronto or Christchurch or Rio de Janeiro) is only possible because the land upon which the café stands was violently wrested from its original, resisting occupants is unpalatable, even preposterous. Why would one talk about land rights and suburbia in the same sentence (unless doing so, as some Australian politicians did in the wake of the Australian High Court's Mabo land decision, for the purposes of hyperbole and scare-mongering [in Fryer-Smith 2000: 35, n.5])?

The subjectivity of 'them' is increasingly enmeshed with the subjectivity of the precariat. This is because 'they' are able to be mobile and therefore to come to 'us' and be the taxi

drivers, cleaners and security guards of the global city (Sassen 1996, 2002; May et al. 2007). The precariat-subject brings together memories of the proletariat of Northern industry—the factory workers who lived the squalor of industrial urbanisation—and the modern exploitation of Southern sweatshops, piece work and pressure. The precariat identity is, especially in large cities, very much a migrant one.[1] 'Their' presence in 'our' midst is made thinkable and doable because the migrant-precariat is a moralised subjectivity—it takes on thankless jobs in the service economy and exists on the fringes of the modern city, aspires to better, and make sacrifices in the hope of change. 'Aspiration' means, in dictionary terms, a lofty or ambitious desire, but in discursive terms, it is a positive and desirable attribute held by docile subjects. Being 'aspirational' is to align with governmental dictates that we regulate, improve and govern ourselves according to normative goals of home ownership, wealth, influence and social mobility. To desire something lofty and ambitious but not normative, such as knowledge disconnected from status or prestige or spiritual fulfilment, might be admirable, but it is not 'aspiration'.

## Silence 2: the periphery

As has been made clear, the city is marked by inequality, and frequently, this inequality is spatially distributed—in some parts of the city there is extreme wealth while in other parts there is dire poverty. But beyond this dichotomy, there are parts of a city that can be defined principally by their being 'not the city', at least, not the city of the city brand. These places are the suburban scars (Baum 2008) of deprivation, social exclusion and 'concentrated disadvantage'. They are, depending on one's political orientation, the collateral damage wreaked by economic restructuring, the victims of an eroding social safety net, or the product of indulgent over-government. If the city is an entity detached from its national and regional context, as argued above, then similarly, the city is rarely conceptualised as including those spaces in any city that are automatically, unattractively and tediously poor.

These places are broadly-speaking an outcome of the post-war welfare state (although the precise sequence of causal factors varies according to the politics of the speaker). Many of them are the visible remnants of a post-war agenda in which the construction of housing for a social purpose was considered a core function of government. However they are also fundamentally inconsequential in that the taken-for-granted history of the emergence of the city (industrialisation, urbanisation, suburbanisation, re-urbanisation, globalisation) could have happened without them. Today, the projects, council estates and broadacres do not have a function in the aspirational, branded, destination city.

I will call these areas 'ghettos'. This is not because I think they are ghettos but because I need a term that encapsulates the way in which they are objectified—talked of—in this particular discourse. 'Ghetto', especially in contemporary usage, is a word that implies isolation, disadvantage and hopelessness in an urban context. The ghetto is a constellation of ideas: dependency (on welfare, the state, each other), the 'culture of poverty', immobility

[1] Precarity is also, increasingly, becoming the dominant experience of young people (Sheen 2013).

(in the sense both of individuals being 'trapped' in poverty and of a general lack of change and dynamism) and crime. It reclaims material out of the past, in this case, through the claim that these areas were once quite different—springboards for opportunity rather than traps of poverty and exclusion (Flanagan 2015a). That this 'springboard' was once conceptualised as centred upon the house itself—as opportunity within the dwelling—is overlooked; now, it is the need to remain in the dwelling, the immobility and inflexibility of the subsidy-tied-to-the-dwelling, which is the source of the dependency 'trap' (Flanagan 2015b).

The ghetto exists as an object within its own discursive formation—one which activates its own subjectivities and produces its own knowledge which is then enacted in its own discursive practices. It is not my intention to detail these here—rather, I want to emphasise one aspect of the ghetto which is significant to the discourse of the city. This is that, unlike the city, which is predicated on movement and change, the ghetto is static. This is partly because by its nature, aspiration and change are precluded. The ghetto is perpetual ('the poor are always with us'), excised (these are locations where outsiders do not go and are not brought to serendipitously—their existence rests on a lack of proximity) and hopeless ('a hopeless case'). Hope is about the future; the future does not exist for the ghetto, and therefore, by extension, it does not exist for its residents. The ghetto is immobile—it and its subjects are characterised by their incapacity to move due to the constrictions of poverty, the nature of the subsidies on offer to them, their own lack of ambition and the structural disadvantages that entrap them. It is also, simultaneously, in some ways infinitely mobile, at least within the confines of the city; the ghetto can move with its subjects because redevelopment can transform the ghetto but nothing can transform the people, so redevelopment produces displacement of the problem, further residualisation of the other ghettos or, in a worst-case scenario, the contamination and decay of another, previously un-ghetto place.

In contrast, the precariat, like the city which it occupies and tends to, is oriented towards the future. Discursively speaking, it could be said that the precariat have children while the residents of the ghetto do not. More precisely, the children of the precariat embody potential (they are, at least according to the popular imagining of a migrant household, urged to succeed in school so as to have the opportunities their parents were denied and to contribute to society); the children of the ghetto are a scourge, associated with burnouts, graffiti and arson attacks. But despite their connection to aspiration and the future, the precariat remains spatially disengaged. The ghetto-dweller, however unwanted, is fixed in space and circumstance, and indelibly linked to the materiality of vandalised playground equipment, overgrown gardens and rusting car bodies; the subjectivity of the precariat is the product of processes predicated on mobility, be it across the globe or within the labour market. Although they tend closely to the fabric of the built environment and the people who populate it, the materiality of this caring labour (see Fine 2007: 173-178) is not enough to anchor them to the place in which it is performed.

More specifically, the precariat are associated increasingly, in Australia and elsewhere, with migration, and migration of a particular kind—migration of 'them', of people of colour, people with different skins and religions and accents. This is not to argue that there are no non-migrants in insecure or temporary work, or that all migrants come from the Global South, but to point to the importance of (specifically non-white) migration within the subjectivity of the precariat. This proximity to a migrant subjectivity is significant, because it associates the precariat subject with a kind of deliberate rootlessness—the migrant (versus the refugee) has voluntarily forsaken their own rightful place and this destabilises their right to demand access to the regular income, stable housing and reliable social services that might serve as a pathway for them to leave the precariat and enter the city.

## 7. Conclusion

And yet—although the ghetto is excluded from the city by its lack of a future, and the precariat by its transience, the ghetto does undeniably have a presence, however curtained off, within the material of the city, and the precariat subjectivity is one which arises from movement and change and is directed at betterment and self-improvement, which is the goal of the city too. There is space, then, in the discourse of the city for the ghetto and the precariat to enter, and through this entry, to possibly transform its constituent rules in ways that cannot be foreseen but might enable more socially just ways of being.

In this extended exercise in describing 'the city' I have not included notions such as 'civic' or 'citizenship'; I have provided no sense of the city as a site for democratic exchange and contribution. The city I have conceptualised is a space of processes and practices that act upon subjects, making available subjectivities with respect to those practices that are predicated on the normalisation of consumption, competition and a brand-able 'authenticity'—the norm of 'choice' creates the chooser, and similarly, the marginality of the unable-to-choose. Does this mean I think civic participation is undesirable and agency is impossible, or that I am rejecting the discourses of the 'right to the city' that other researchers have sought to use to counter the spatialised inequality of many modern cities (Harvey 2003)? I can see that my argument could be read that way, but I don't intend it to be.

I am not claiming my description is definitive. It is my focus on a particular form of the city that leads to these absences in my account. This form of the city is marketed partly through the implication that within a given city there is a vibrant local participatory culture that is inclusive of all ways of life, but although the city offers the freedoms of autonomy and choice, these are rarely conceptualised in terms of democratic choice or subsidiarity. There is a lot of value in conceptualisations of cities, such as that put forward by Catherine Fennell (2015), which examine how, as our world globalises, local expressions of civic responsibility and civic care become more important. But examining how such expressions can be evoked is not what I am doing here. Because for those of us who live in cities, the discourse of the city is normalised, pervasive and overwhelming. If we also believe it to be inherently unjust,

problematic or undesirable, we have to be able to see it for what it is before we can get rid of it and build a different kind of city in its place.

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